

[Home](#) > [Resources](#) > [Classroom Practice](#) > [Curriculum](#)

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sidebar: How to Analyze a Curriculum Unit or Project and Provide the Scaffolding Students Need to Succeed**Type:** Old Horace (vol 5-17)**Source:** *Horace*. Vol. 15, #2. Nov. 1998

How do you know if a unit of curriculum - whether your own or another's - stands up against the Essential School belief in student-centered, inquiry-driven work that has meaning both in its discipline and in the larger world? Adria Steinberg, program director for the Quality Work-Based Learning Network at Jobs For the Future (www.jff.org) in Boston, created this quick project analysis tool that works equally well for a project, a unit, or a year-long course.

I. Dimensions of Quality Project-Based Learning**Group Size:**

[Describe in terms of the continuum below]

Whole class does the same project together

Class breaks into small teams, each doing a project

Each individual in the class does his/her own project

Method for Arriving at Project Structures and Topics:

[Describe in terms of the continuum below]

Assigned by teacher

Negotiated between student and teacher within constraints

Negotiated between student and teacher without constraints

Duration:

[Describe in terms of the continuum below]

Several Days

Several weeks

Full Semester or year

Integration of Subjects:

[Describe in terms of the continuum below]

Involves one subject area

Integrates two subject areas

Integrates more than two subject areas

II. The "Six A's " of Quality Project-Based Learning

AUTHENTICITY

1. Does the project emanate from a problem or question that has meaning to the student?
2. Is it a problem or question that might actually be tackled by an adult at work or in the community?
3. Does it provide opportunities to create or produce something that has personal or social value?

NOTES. . .

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ACADEMIC RIGOR

1. Does the project lead students to acquire and apply knowledge related to one or more discipline or content areas?
2. Does it challenge students to use methods of inquiry central to one or more disciplines?
3. Do students develop higher-order thinking skills and habits of mind?

NOTES. . .

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

APPLIED LEARNING

1. Are students solving a semi-structured problem, grounded in the life and work in the world beyond the school?
2. Does the work require students to develop organizational and self-management skills?
3. Does the project lead students to acquire and use competencies expected in high-performance work organizations (for example, teamwork, problem-solving, appropriate use of technology, communications)?

NOTES. . .

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ACTIVE EXPLORATION

1. Do students spend significant amounts of time doing field-based work on the project?
2. Does it require students to engage in real investigation using a variety of methods, media, and sources?
3. Are students expected to communicate what they are learning through presentation?

NOTES. . .

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

1. Do students meet and observe adults with relevant expertise and experience?

NOTES. . .

<p>2. Do students work closely with and get to know at least one adult?</p> <p>3. Do the adults collaborate with one another and students on the design and assessment of project work?</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p>ASSESSMENT</p> <p>1. Will there be opportunities for regular assessment of student work through a range of methods (for example, exhibitions, portfolios)?</p> <p>2. Do students reflect on their learning, using clear project criteria that they helped to set?</p> <p>3. Are adults from outside the classroom involved in the assessment of the work?</p>	<p>NOTES. . .</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>

III. Scaffolding

1. Explicit Expectations and Criteria

- Are there clear guidelines for students to use in planning their project work?
- Do students know how their work will be assessed?
- Were students involved in the establishment of criteria for the assessment?

[Notes:]

2. Resources

- Are students given the opportunity to review exemplars of work other students have done on similar projects?
- Do students have a mentor or coach to support the field-based elements of the project?
- Do students know how to use and have access to the technology necessary for research and exhibition?

[Notes:]

3. Milestones, Ongoing Assessment, and Continuous Feedback

- Are there check-in points at the completion of each distinct phase of the work?

- Are students expected to turn in a series of "deliverables" prior to the final product?
- Do students engage in periodic, structured self- assessment of their progress?

[Notes:]

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